

Rezension: Kathleen Collins: Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia

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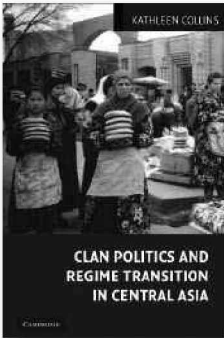
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Kathleen Collins, Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia, Cambridge 2006 (Cambridge University Press), 376 S.

In recent years, two schools of thought have shaped scholarly debate concerning the political development of Central Asia. The first, characterised by a new institutionalist perspective, is that regional identities (*oblast* and *raion*) shaped by formal Soviet institutional legacies are a primary factor driving the state building process in Central Asia.¹ The second, emphasising a more traditionalist outlook, argues that informal pre-soviet identities are shaping political outcomes.² Kathleen Collins book builds and expands on the latter arguing that rather than formal Soviet legacies shaping the developmental trajectories of post-Soviet transition in Central Asia, it is rather the hegemony of 'clan politics', an extensive network of kin and fictive kinship relations, that is the dominant social and political force.

In this volume Collins explores the influence of clan politics on regime transition in Central Asia. Clan politics is viewed as 'profoundly impacting both the nature and direction of regime transition and the potential for regime viability during and after the transition' (p. 21). Her argument is supported by a weighty assortment of sources including elite interviews, primary data (newspapers and reports) and secondary sources. Using comparative historical political analysis, Collins explains that the divergent trends of Kyrgyzstan (democracy), Tajikistan (regime collapse) and Uzbekistan's (autocracy) early transition, as well as their later convergence, is highly contingent upon the influence of kinship clan dynamics.

Collins book asks two questions: why and how do clans exist? And how do they impact on regime transition and durability? In her view, clans persist under three conditions: late state formation (due to a colonial hegemonic influence), late formation of national identities and an economy of shortage. In explaining how clan politics has impacted on the nature and durability of regime transition and long-term political trajectories Collins puts forward a theoretical framework that is underpinned by the logic that kinship (or fictive kinship) bonds produce social norms that reinforce clan identity networks at the mass and elite level. From this emerge patronage networks where resources are distributed along clan divisions. Elite behaviour is constrained by this clan rational and therefore limits the ability of regime consolidation. Clan networks impact firstly on the process of 'pacting' and clan balancing during the transition period. Pacts put clans informally behind the levers of power in circumvention of formal institu-

- 1 Pauline Jones Luong, *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, Cambridge 2002.
- 2 Edward Schatz, *Modern Clan Politics and Beyond: The Power of "Blood" in Kazakhstan*, Washington D.C. 2005.

tions. Consequently, clan pacts (or absence of them) explain the durability or non-durability of the regime during transition. In the long term, however, Collins argues that clans can have a negative impact on political trajectory and regime consolidation due, in the first instance, to clans using the state as a source of patronage and resources. This leads to 'asset stripping' and the 'crowding out' of non-clan forms of association (political parties, unions or class organisations). Thus formal state institutions are weak while presidents are forced to balance the competing interests of different clan groups placing their legitimacy on an almost constant precarious footing.

Initially, Collins explains how clans persisted during the Tsarist and Soviet periods of Central Asian history. Attempts by the Soviet regime to enforce socialism and eradicate clan influence failed. The Soviet *Kolkhoz* system was co-opted by local clan networks which retained exclusive control, while the policy of *Korenizatsiia* (native cadre development) allowed native clan networks to remain in powerful positions and maintain responsibility for the allocation of resources. During the Brezhnev era the power of clan networks intensified as Moscow allowed a form of indirect rule which allowed for a longevity and hegemony of clan access to power and resources – particularly in the case of the Khodjenti clan in Tajikistan. Accordingly, even though Soviet policies interacted with and shaped clan identities and informal networks, they were also responsible for reinforcing them.

The core of the book empirically demonstrates how the persistence of clan networks impacted on the regime transitions, durability and long-term trajectories of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Collins highlights the significance of the informal clan pacts which brought Akaev and Karimov to power in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan as an explanation for regime stability during the transition, while the absence of any form of clan pact in Tajikistan is proposed as the reason for regime collapse. The stability of pacts are based on three conditions: equal balance of power among clans, presence of a legitimate leader who can broker the pact and stability of military and security forces while a sufficient degree on economic resources to divide among the groups was also important. Moving on, Collins analyses how 'clan-based societies severely constrict the influence of elite ideologies and elites' choices' (p. 208) and therefore, impacts on regime stability. This is evidenced in the case of Kyrgyzstan by the decline in economic resources as the state was stripped of its assets and increasingly placed in the hands of Akaev's family and clan. Consequently, this placed the stability of the early transitional pact at risk and, according to Collins, was responsible for the forcing out of Akaev as president in 2005 due to the preference he was giving to his own clan as opposed to those from the southern regions. Proving regime fragility due to the unstable nature of clan politics in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is more difficult, however, Collins puts forward a convincing case that both regimes are not only converging towards a form of autocracy but also demonstrate a situation where presidents Karimov and Rakhmonov are slowly

consolidating power and resources within their own families and clans – thus placing the informal clan pacts on a perilous footing. The final chapter attempts to provide a wider comparative analysis of clan politics linking it to historical and contemporary developments in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan as well as parts of Africa and the Middle East and Italy.

While overall Collins puts forward a clear, concise and well grounded case for a ‘clan’ perspective on Central Asian political development, there are four central problems with the approach. First, Collins suggests her approach is not inherently orientalist, as she argues that clan influence can disappear and be removed. However, her argument implies an overall emphasis on the linkage between autocracy and clans as well as the conflict potential of clan politics. She insists clans can only be broken down by the institutionalisation of a Western style market economy. This implies a pre-determinant understanding of Central Asian development that views clans as a form of social organisation which is regressive and non-responsive to democratisation and that their continued influence leads only to autocracy unless, however, they are reconciled with Western methods of economic and social organisation. Second, despite providing definitional clarity at the beginning of the book as the text develops a sense of definitional confusion emerges. In particular the comparative section, aligns a culturally laced understanding of clan with more economic specific concepts such as, clientelism, corruption and patron-client relations. There seems to be little distinction between these terms when Collins is trying to fit the model to other cases. Third, it is possible to observe a certain over-stating of the power of kinship based clan identities. Recent scholarship suggests that identities can be based on wider social networks as opposed to narrow clan kinship identities as the events of 2002 in Ashgabat, Kyrgyzstan indicate.³ Or as in the case of Kazakhstan, the emergence of inter elite cleavages are founded not on kin-based networks but socio-economic cleavages.⁴ Finally, recent events in both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan point to the restricted explanatory nature of a kinship based clan perspective. The removal of members of Nazarbayev’s family from political office and business interests, such as Rakhat Aliev, Dariga Nazarbayeva and Timur Kulibayev suggest that kinship ties are not as important as the clan perspective purports. Also, the smooth transition of power, following the death of Turkmen president Saparmurat Niyazov, which placed Berdimukhamyedov in the presidency was counter to claims the death of Niyazov would send Turkmenistan spiralling into chaos and conflict between competing clans.

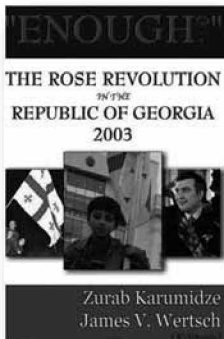
Nevertheless, Collins excellent book points to the importance and unreserved attention that needs to be given to the influence of ‘informal politics’ in post-Soviet Central Asia. Individually, both the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ approaches to

3 Radnitz Scott, Networks, Localism and mobilisation in Ashgabat, Kyrgyzstan. In: Central Asian Survey, 24 (2005) 4, pp. 405–424.

4 Barbara Junisbai/Azamat Junisbai, The Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan: A Case Study in Economic Liberalization, Intraelite Cleavage, and Political Opposition. In: Demokratizatsiya, 13 (2005) 3, pp. 373–392.

Central Asian politics present a rather exclusionary framework – maybe future studies could consider a midway approach that explores the interaction between the influence of informal politics and practices and the elite level actors and emerging formal institutions. This would allow for a more open approach to the diverse factors and agents impacting post-Soviet political development in Central Asia.

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Zurab Karumidze/James V. Wertsch (eds.), "Enough!" The Rose Revolution in the Republic of Georgia 2003, New York 2005 (Nova Science Publishers), 143 S.

Numerous analyses have been written about the so-called 'coloured revolutions,' unearthing the causes that led to the downfall of the (semi-) authoritarian regimes in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005). In general, this literature can be divided into two approaches. On one hand, the bottom-up approach identifies the opposition and its ability to mobilize the masses as the primary force that drove the Milosevic, Shevardnadze, Kuchma/Yanukovich, and Akaev regimes from power.¹ Within this approach, we can further differentiate between those authors who emphasize the role of Western governments and international organizations in strengthening the opposition and other authors who downplay the impact of foreign support, emphasizing the home-grown strength of opposition movements.² On the other hand, the state-centrist approach attributes the collapse of the incumbents to their inability to control the state apparatus' coercive forces.³

Enough! does not side with either approach. Its editors, Zurab Karumidze and James V. Wertsch, eschew larger theoretical questions. Instead, the editors provide us with a rich empirical account of the 2003 events in Georgia, starting

- 1 For example, Eric McGlinchey, Central Asian Protest Movements: Social Forces or State Resources? In: Amanda Wooden/Christoph H. Stefes (eds.) Politics of Transition in Central Asia and the Caucasus, New York/Oxford 2008 (forthcoming); Michael McFaul, Transitions from Postcommunism. In: Journal of Democracy, 16 (2005)3, pp. 5–19.
- 2 While Lincoln Mitchell emphasizes the crucial role of Western organizations and governments, Michael McFaul treats foreign support as less important. McFaul, Transitions from Postcommunism; Lincoln Mitchell, Explaining Georgia's Rose Revolution. In: Current History, (October 2004), pp. 342–348.
- 3 For instance, Lucan Way, State Power and Autocratic Stability: Armenia and Georgia Compared. In: Wooden/ Stefes (eds.) Politics of Transition (forthcoming).